

Establishing Structure and Routine for Kids During COVID-19

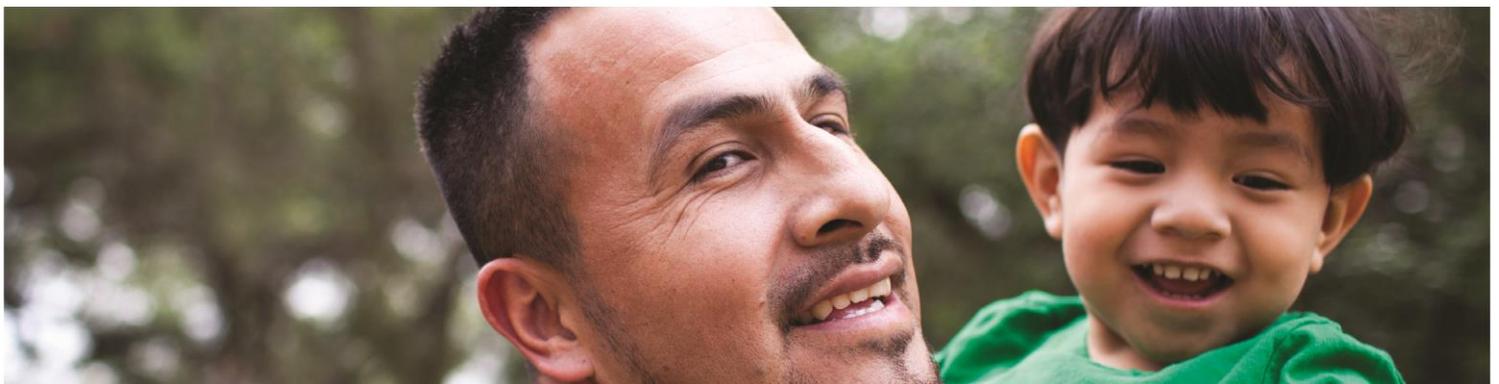
During a time of crisis when so many things are unknown, creating a routine serves several important functions:

- It provides structure and predictability during times of uncertainty
- Structure promotes reassurance and a sense of safety
- Routines promote positive physical and mental health

Children inherently turn to structure and routine for reassurance during times of uncertainty. Structure and routine help to maintain balance and normalcy. The more a child can anticipate what's up ahead, the better they are prepared to face daily challenges and expectations.

Here are some suggestions in establishing a routine:

- Don't get carried away and over-commit to an extensive schedule. Start small and slowly build into it as you see it working for your child.
- Set aside some time to review the schedule and expectations with your child. This will ensure that they understand what is expected of them as well as when they can have free or play time.
- For younger children, consider using a visual schedule format. This could be in the form of a chart, or a clock with activities placed on it, or any other format your child can understand.
- Start with a good wake up and bedtime routine. The goal is to stay as close to their daily school schedule as possible to allow for a smooth transition. This allows their physiological system to maintain a healthy balance between activity and rest periods. This is essential for regulating key hormones linked to our mood, hunger, and sleep to name a few.
- Encourage your child to change out of pajamas and participate in regular grooming/hygiene activities (e.g., brushing teeth, washing face, taking showers, etc.).
- Schedule in meals and snacks as they would normally have during the school day.
- Set aside a quiet workspace for your child to complete schoolwork. Most schools are in the process or have already transitioned to distance learning. Get into the habit of having your child complete their daily school assignments each day.



- Schedule harder tasks (usually classwork) to be completed earlier in the day when your child is more refreshed and rested and save easier tasks for later in the day.
- Allow for natural breaks “recess” throughout the day. This time can be spent relaxing, listening to music, reading for fun, engaging in a hobby, exercising, etc. During this time, be attentive to your child’s mood, when they are overly stressed or anxious, you might schedule in additional fun breaks.
- Allow opportunities to help around the house (simple chores). This can be as simple as setting the table, folding laundry, or walking the family dog. Giving a child a simple task or job to do can help build up their sense of empowerment.
- Encourage hobbies and other creative outlets. Your once busy child now has the gift of time to engage in creative outlets such as drawing, painting, cooking, designing, writing a short story or play, building a fort, and so on. Hobbies are a great way to foster creativity and imagination all while giving a child something to do to break up their day.
- Set aside time for outdoor activities (using good social distancing guidelines). This is a great opportunity to go for a short family hike, bike ride, or walk around the neighborhood. The goal is to remain active and physical while upholding good social distancing guidelines.
- Engage in mindfulness and stress relieving activities. Many mediation and mindfulness apps are offering free downloads and reduced subscription dues for many effective mediation, guided imagery, and stress reduction exercises/activities your child can do. Choc.org also has some additional options on their website: www.choc.org/coping
- Allow screen time as needed. It’s inevitable that your child will want to connect online or spend some time in front of a screen. Screen time is a great way to reward your child for completing their tasks such as chores and schoolwork. As always, monitor and ensure safety measures are in place to allow for safe screen time.
- Schedule time to connect with friends via technology, this can include video conferencing, text or social media. Social connections are important for children to continue to achieve their developmental goals. Virtual play dates or activities such as creating the same craft together.

<https://blog.chocchildrens.org/establishing-structure-and-routine-for-kids-during-covid-19/>

